

TECHNICAL NOTES

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NEVADA

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

TN - BIOLOGY - NV- 34

MAY 1990

Mallard

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WYOMING

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 214

January 1986

Subject: MALLARD*

General

The mallard (Anas platyrhynchos) is a common resident and abundant migrant in this region. It is the most abundant duck in Colorado and occurs statewide.

Food Requirements

Ninety percent of the mallard's diet is vegetable matter, including sedges, grasses, smartweeds, pondweeds, and duckweeds. Animal food includes insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and fishes. One study reported that mallards feed primarily by picking up food on the water's surface or by partial submersion in the water of lakes, ponds, sloughs, streams, and swamps.

Large flocks of mallards may feed in stubble fields of corn, wheat, oats, barley, and rye in the fall.

Water Requirements

No drinking water requirements were found in the literature. Shallow-water feeding areas are an important habitat component.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1985.

Cover Requirement

A variety of different habitats can support mallards provided they offer sufficient food and open water. This species of waterfowl adapts readily to open prairies, wooded wetlands, swamps, marshes, and grain fields.

In the Delta marsh of Canada, long narrow sloughs served as loafing areas for mallards. Ungrazed areas, dense with vegetation, were generally avoided for loafing. One study reports that floating islands and gradually sloping shorelines met the bird's loafing requirements in Montana.

Reproductive Requirements

Mallards nest in a variety of situations that include marshy areas on prairies, willow-lined streams in sage country, and around wooded lakes in the high country of Colorado. One study reported that mallards prefer fairly dry sites, such as in upland weeds, dry marshes, or in hayfields. Mallards will sometimes nest in trees or in stumps. In North Dakota, nest sites were in dry or slightly marshy areas near lakes, as well as on open prairies far from water.

The nest is usually a hollow in the ground lined with dead vegetation and feathers well hidden in tall vegetation. The majority of nest sites in Colorado were in vegetation 8 to 16 in. (20-40 cm) tall. The vegetation at nesting sites in Minnesota ranged from 10 to 50 in. (25.4 to 127 cm) tall, averaging 24 in. (61.0 cm). In California, mallards preferred vegetation 13 to 24 in. (33.0 to 61.0 cm) in height, although vegetation up to 12 in. (30.5 cm) was also heavily used. Two-thirds of the nests were concealed on all four sides, and 50 percent were concealed from above. Ninety-three percent of the nests were within 50 yd (45.7 m) of water. One study reports that mallard nests are generally within 300 ft (90 m) of water.

Special Habitat Requirements

No special habitat requirements were found in the literature.

Interspersion Requirements

In a prairie pothole habitat in Canada, the average breeding density was 6.1 pairs/mi² (2.6 km²). In Saskatchewan, one study reported densities ranging from 9 to 54 pairs/mi² (2.6 km²). Males do not defend a rigidly defined area and apparent territories often overlap. The female mallard seems to be the focus of defense.

Special Considerations

Mallards are migratory, wintering wherever food and open water are available. In Colorado, a study stated that many locally breeding ducks remain during the winter unless pushed south by bad weather.